

Draft Statement on Work in the Stalinist Arena

The major "break" in the Stalinist world brought into being by the 20th Party Congress of the Russian CP creates certain new opportunities for the Young Socialist League to enter into political dialogue with some elements among the Stalinist and Stalinoid youth and young adults, while at the same time making it necessary to combat certain illusions among others concerning the basic nature of the Stalinist regime and the Stalinist parties.

To underestimate the deepness of the political and organizational crisis that now confronts the Stalinist movement in this country, would be to fail to seize the best opportunity in many years to make political inroads on the C.P. and the LYL. Partially, of course, the "newness" of this situation is due to our increased consciousness of the possibilities of working effectively among Stalinist youth. Yet, the crisis within the C.P. and LYL is a real one and calls for the development of tactics and techniques suitable for the situation.

The basic line of the YSL toward the Stalinist Youth Group was enunciated in paragraphs 12 through 15 inclusive, of the September 1955 convention document "Tasks and Orientation of the YSL". The National Executive Committee reaffirms the decision of the convention as being the foundation for our work in the current situation.

However, given this foundation, we must examine what is new about the LYL. It must be understood that the center of political controversy in the Stalinist movement will be in the Communist Party; its effect on the LYL will be primarily organizational, even though the political questions will be raised within the ranks of the LYL. Here it must be pointed out that the LYL leadership even more successfully than the CP leadership, has been able to guide all discussion in the LYL around the question of whether or not the LYL "is the best kind of organization" for American youth work today. The studied unpolitical nature of the LYL makes this kind of ruse highly successful. It is our task to point up the ~~fallacy of~~ fallacious nature of this question, and to confront the Stalinist Youth with a revolutionary Socialist alternative and critique of Stalinism.

Specifically, the kind of proposals made for the "possible" revamping of the LYL are these: (1) The LYL should no longer be conceived as a "Marxist", i.e., "sectarian" group because it has no relevance in American Youth Life; (2) a broader, "youth front" type of group should be formed with "all kinds" of points of view represented; (3) that the LYL, although continuing to exist as a nucleus, will do little as a public organization and the members will have as their chief task, to operate in other, eg., Young Democrats, SDA, etc., arenas. Obviously all of these, or combinations thereof, are real possibilities for the new form which the Stalinist leaders are casting about for. In any case, the practical activity of the Stalinists in the last 3 years has been along the above lines. The success of the LYL in turning itself into a "broader", non-"Marxist" group, is, of course, problematical. Yet, it must be recognized that this is in fact the tendency already today. The Stalinist movement in the current period is and will continue to intensify its line of the past few years which leads it to support the Democratic Party and in particular the Stevenson wing, and sending its members into the Democratic Party and liberal organizations.

There is a further possibility which must be mentioned.

It is highly probable that on a number of campuses where there are Cochranites and Sweezyites of any ability, that "broad" Socialist clubs which will have LYL'ers in them will be formed. If such a development occurs, then the YSL must make every effort to get its speakers invited to speak to such clubs. Furthermore, in those areas in which a development of this nature occurs in which there are YSL'ers on the same campus, the local YSL should investigate in connection with the NAC, the possibility of sending one or more comrades into such a club or forum. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of special problems posed for us by the developments: 1. The general diffusion of the Stalinists' appearances within other organizations, making it harder to identify them politically, and creating, among liberals especially, a great many illusions about the Stalinists. 2. The difficulty of dealing with the Stalinists line; that is, they may not, even though it is highly doubtful, always seek to capture every organization which they participate in. Both of these problems can be dealt with within the framework of the Convention resolutions, but the application will require special care and flexibility.

Our objectives toward the Stalinists and the LYL are these:

1. To win them over to us, politically., 2. To raise questions to them such as to make them raise these questions within the LYL and CP. 3. To encourage political differences within the CP and LYL. It goes without saying that we consider both the CP and the LYL inherently incapable of becoming "socialist" organizations; yet to heighten the controversy within the Stalinist movement is to open up the possibility of reaching those sincere members of these organizations and also to force them to learn for themselves the basically reactionary nature of the CP and LYL; and eventually to recruit them to ourselves.

Practically speaking, this means that it is necessary to differentiate between sincere, idealistic members of the CP or LYL and their reactionary organizations, all the while recognizing that there are many genuine "Stalinists" within the CP and LYL for whom socialism is not a desirable alternative to bureaucratic collectivist ideology.

We must be aware of the types of youth in and around the Stalinist Youth movement.

1. The teen-ager, basically oriented to folk songs and the youth program of peoples artists etc. Some of these are "second generation" Stalinists who are often non-political, and non-rebellious. Others are youth in rebellion - the rebellion taking this quasi political, quasi-Bohemian form. YSL'ers have an understandable, but unfortunate tendency to feel "superior" to this type of Stalinist-Stalinoid (the line of difference at this level is obviously almost meaningless). While the YSL cannot become similar to the Stalinist youth movement (and does not desire to) and create its own "folksy", non-political atmosphere, we must concentrate some of our activities in trying to contact these youth. One of the ~~great~~ great virtues of this politically naive group is that they are not in any meaningful sense "stalinists" even though they may be nominal members of the LYL.

2. The LYL political. There are three sub-types discernable here: older Stalinist hacks who provide the leadership of the organization and who for the most part go back to pre-Korean days; the children of Stalinists; and young Student radicals who do not fall into either of the 2 other sub-types, and who are not completely Stalinized. It is this last sub-group that provides the most fertile grounds for our activities. They do not have the same kind of built-in hostility to YSL'ers as do older LYLers, and are looking for, and eager to receive a political education. Any contact with these youth should

be carefully nurtured, and extreme patience be utilized in dealing with them. Contact work with them should not be left to chance and indirection.

3. Stalinists in their mid-twenties. Due to the particular configuration of the YSL, this group is of legitimate concern for us. While some of these are obviously no different than hard-core Stalinists who will remain in the CP under all circumstances, there are others who are essentially radicals. Not only are they radicals, but they are highly intelligent, highly trained politicals, and even at times have a degree of Marxist training. We must not consider all of these of the damned, and consign them to the outer darkness. We have in the past won such people away from the Stalinists - and provided ourselves with some of our competent leaders and activists. Similar people, although probably fewer, still remain with the Stalinist movement. We must orient toward them, must utilize every avenue to into touch with them.

It is of great importance to stress here that we must not take the stance toward the Stalinist movement of "left-critics", i.e., of identifying the Stalinist movement as a "right-wing", albeit Socialist tendency. First of all, this is not our political position; secondly, and practically, a "left-critic" stance accomplishes nothing in terms of the Stalinist movement because it fails to distinguish us from the Stalinoid groups, many of whom act as left critics and makes it impossible to raise any sharp, real questions (e.g., the class nature of Russian society) - the only ones which will stimulate the kind of results which we desire to see within the Stalinist movement. In terms of creating internal pressures, as much - indeed more - can be done by our urging naive LYLers to carry out their objections and protestations within the LYL (especially to the point of trying to organize factions) - all of the while stressing our political analysis and telling them that we do not believe it is possible to reform the LYL, but that, if we cannot convince them of this, we are "willing" to them try to push for their demands. At this juncture any discussion and dissension, ~~no matter how~~ of almost any trend, is, within the Stalinist movement very significant because ~~it does~~ it does open up the possibilities mentioned above.

Debates and Forums.

a. We should try to confront the Stalinists in terms of public debates on crucial issues (various facets of current Stalinist politics) whenever and wherever possible. Public debates or forums on questions such as the "American Road to Socialism", etc., should generally be avoided because it gives to the Stalinists that cloak of legitimacy which they are so desperately searching for today. Although it has been our experience that the Stalinists are not willing to debate us, a great deal of pressure can be exerted upon the LYL thru constant contact with their rank-and-file members - thus forcing the LYL leadership (e.g., New York) to consent to "discuss" the possibility of a debate. In any case an excellent opportunity is opened for either directly confronting the Stalinists (the most desirable alternative), or of exposing them as unwilling to have their views publicly challenged. It goes without saying, that where meetings are organized which do not conform to the desirable conditions set out above, we will allow ourselves considerable leeway to deal with each concrete proposal as they arise.

b. United fronts: Our position here ~~is~~ remains essentially the same. What needs to be added is a caution that the ability of the Stalinists to dissemble themselves and the softness of their current line gives rise to ~~the~~ illusions among liberal students about the possibility of working with Stalinists.